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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Friday, February 4, 1938

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "USING CANNED MEAT." Information from the Bureau of Home Economics, United States Department of Agriculture.

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The other day I had a letter from Helen, a friend of mine who lives on a farm. This letter of Helen's was full of what she has been doing. And it seems she's been even busier than usual. It's been slaughtering time on their farm. And for Helen that means canning time.

This letter reminded me of the last time I visited Helen. It was about this same time of year. When I got to her house she was just finishing with her meat canning. The steam pressure canner was on the stove with the last load in it.

Helen was scurrying around the kitchen cleaning up -- washing pans and kettles. And all about were cans and cans of beef that she had already put up. It seemed amazing that a family of four would consume all that meat before long.

Helen invited me for dinner that day. And of course I stayed. We had fresh beefsteak I remember. And I got a preview of what some of Helen's meals were going to be for months afterwards.

It all started with an innocent question of mine. I just asked her if she didn't think her family would get awfully tired of canned meat before long. That started her off. And she set out to enlighten me. She told me that her family didn't even know that she did serve them the same kind of meat a lot. She varied it with different seasonings. She used special sauces. She combined it with different fresh vegetables.

And she has a number of special dishes that call for canned meat. She pointed out to me that canned meat is a very cosmopolitan food. She can use it in Spanish dishes. Or she can go Chinese with it. But she added that she usually sticks to plain American dishes -- and there are a lot of those.

For instance, some of that meat would go into tamale pie. That's a dish with a Spanish accent if there ever was one. To make this she first lines a pan with plain cornmeal mush. Then she pours in a mixture of chopped canned meat and tomatoes.

Of course this mixture is all seasoned to her taste with salt and pepper and chili powder. Over the meat mixture she puts a lid of the mush.

There she has it -- a tamale pie. Into the oven it goes. When the mush is lightly browned in the moderate oven, she takes it out. Result -- an inexpensive, delicious dish using some of her canned meat.

If Helen feels a little more Chinese -- she makes chop suey with her canned meat. In fact, chop suey suppers are one of her favorite ways of entertaining.

A lot of Helen's canned meat will go into a plain American dish -- hash. Of course hash is a general term that covers a lot of territory. Helen's particular version is hash patties. She grinds boiled potatoes and meat together and seasons them well with finely chopped onion and green pepper or parsley if she has some on hand. Then she molds out flat cakes. She browns these cakes -- in a thick skillet that's not overly hot. She uses some kind of beef fat if she has it -- either suet she's fried out or the fat part of drippings from a steak or roast. She browns the patties slowly on both sides. Result -- browned hash patties that are a company dish.

For Sunday night suppers or for a quick meal any time Helen likes to serve a hot meat and onion sandwich. She cooks up a pint of sliced onions in about 3 cups of liquid. Then she thickens this up a little with flour.

Into this she stirs a pint of meat all chopped up. She seasons it. This makes a delicious filling between slices of toasted bread or hot biscuits. It's served hot of course, with plenty of meat gravy and a slice of dill pickle.

Here are some of Helen's other dishes -- peppers stuffed with a seasoned chopped meat mixture -- and croquettes of mashed potato and meat -- curry of meat -- meat baked in pinwheel biscuits.

Helen often combines her meat with vegetables that are in season. She makes up a meat mixture similar to that with which she stuffs peppers. Then she wraps this up in raw cabbage leaves, cooked for a few minutes first in hot water so they're pliable enough to roll. Then she puts these stuffed cabbage rolls in a pan with a little hot water or gravy. She covers the pan and bakes until the cabbage is tender.

She also gets vegetable combinations in meat and vegetable stews. Turnips -- carrots -- and potatoes are some she might use at this time of the year.

After Helen had told me of some of the special dishes she makes out of canned meat she branched out onto another subject. She told me of all the seasonings she uses -- some are ordinary -- some I'd never used myself.

She tries her hand with onions -- herbs like sage, and thyme, and sweet basil -- and bay leaf -- celery tops -- and paprika. And in addition to these old favorites she uses curry powder -- grated horseradish -- garlic buttons -- even a little grated lemon or orange peel.

If she hears of something new that sounds good -- she tries that. She uses different sauces -- especially the tomato sauces. One particularly good combination is ground meat with tomato puree in a sauce for spaghetti a la Napoli.

Helen says she really likes to **use cooked** canned meat for two reasons. One is that it makes her feel creative. Thinking up a new dish is something like painting a picture or writing a book.

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The other reason is more practical. She likes to use canned meat because it saves time. Canned meat has already been cooked. It needn't be cooked over 10 or 15 minutes after it is opened and combined with another food. And it should not be cooked long. Overcooking already cooked meat makes it tough and dry.

If Helen can help it, canned meat will never get monotonous in her home. For she approaches the cooking with a spirit of adventure. She tries new flavors -- new ways of serving dishes. And she gives her dishes a timely note by using fresh vegetables of the season.
